ALABAMA BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MINUTES

OF THE

FOURTH ANNUAL SESSION

OF THE

HARMONY
Baptist Association,

HELD AT

ENON MEETING HOUSE,

BIBB COUNTY, ALABAMA,

From the 9th to the 11th of October, 1880.

TUSKALOOSA, ALA.:
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1880.

MINUTES.

SATURDAY, October 9th, 1880.

1. The Delegates from the Churches composing the fourth annual session of the Harmony Baptist Association convened with the Enon Church on this day, at 11 o'clock. The Introductory Sermon was preached by Elder N. H. Williams, from Nehemiah, 4th chapter and latter clause of the 6th verse: "For the people had a mind to work."

The assembly then adjourned one hour for dinner.

2. At 2 o'clock P. M. the delegates assembled in the meeting-house, and the Association was called to order by the former Moderator, Elder N. H. Williams. A hymn was sung, and prayer was offered by Elder Daniel Ward.

3. The roll of the Churches was called. The Delegates brought forward the letters from their various churches, and voted for Moderator and Clerk. Elder N. H. Williams was re-elected Moderator, and James N. Hayes, Clerk. Charley Woods and Newton Brown, by request, read the letters. [The roll of the Delegates' names will appear in the Tabular Statement at the end of these Minutes.]

4. The Moderator proceeded to take up the business as follows, and appointed the following committees:

Preaching.—J. W. Matthews, M. J. Parsons, John N. Hayes, and the Deacons of this Church.

Nominations.—D. H. Lewis, R. H. Blake, J. J. Little.

Documents.—Elder S. V. McGinnis, Elder G. R. Fuller, and John N. Hayes.

Finance.—Elder G. R. Fuller, D. H. Lewis, and James N. Hayes.

Sunday Schools.—Elder S. V. McGinnis, Elder G. R. Fuller, D. H. Lewis, W. B. Perry, John N. Hayes, and R. H. Blake.

Home and Foreign Missions.—Elder G. R. Fuller, M. J. Parsons and J. J. Little.

Deceased Ministers.—Elder S. V. McGinnis and J. J. Little.

5. Received correspondence as follows:

Mulberry.—Elder Daniel Ward, Elder J. M. Langston, Elder O. V. Cottingham, and A. J. Woolly, with letter and minutes.

Tuscaloosa.—J. H. Ward, J. G. Lowery, John Lowery, and W. H. Logan, with letter.

6. Returned correspondence as follows:

Canaan.—J. J. Little and R. H. Blake.

Cahaba.—R. H. Blake and J. J. Little.

Mud Creek.—M. J. Parsons, J. Riley, J. J. Little, and J.N.Hayes.

Mulberry.—Elders N. H. Williams, S. V. McGinnis, G. R. Fuller, and Brethren D. H. Lewis and R. H. Blake.

Shelby.—F. M. Arnold, Stephen Johnson, and J. D. McElroy.

Tuscaloosa.—Elders S. V. McGinnis, G. R. Fuller, John Riley, D. H. Lewis, J. J. Little, John N. Hayes, and James N. Hayes.

7. The Committee on Preaching reported: Preaching to-night at candle-light by Elder E. R. Fuller; Prayer-meeting to-morrow morning at 9 o'clock, conducted by R. H. Blake; Preaching at 11 o'clock by Elder S. V. McGinnis; after a short intermission, Preaching by Elder G. R. Fuller.

The Association then adjourned until 9 o'clock Monday morning. Prayer by J. G. Lowery. (Elder G. R. Fuller preached at candle-light, from Genesis 47th chapter and latter clause of the 8th verse: "How old art thou?")

SABBATH, October 10th, 1880.

8. The appointments, as announced by the Committee on Preaching, were attended to as reported. Elder S. V. McGinnis preached at 11 o'clock, from the 25th chapter of Matthew, 14th and 15th verses—"For the Kingdom of Heaven is as a man traveling into a far country, who called his own servants and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability, and straightway took his journey."

After a short intermission, preaching by Elder G. R. Fuller, from the third chapter of I. John, 1st verse—"Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God; therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not."

Preaching at candle-light by Elder S. V. McGinnis, from St. John, 11th chapter, latter clause of the 28th verse—"The Master is come, and calleth for thee."

MONDAY, October 11th, 1880.

9. According to adjournment, the Association met and was opened with prayer by Elder J. M. Langston.

10. By motion, the Constitution, Articles of Faith, and Rules of Decorum were read.

11. By motion, the 5th article of the constitution was changed so as to read as follows: "Every Church in our union shall be entitled to representation in the following manner: each church shall be entitled to five delegates, and no more. Any church failing to represent herself as above prescribed, shall state her reasons at the next session."

12. The roll was called and absentees noted. Invited visiting ministers to seats.

13. By motion, the Association elected a Stated Clerk, which resulted in the choice of James N. Hayes.

14. The Committee on Nominations reported:—

We recommend that the next session of this Association be held with the Mt. Carmel Church, on Saturday before the second Sabbath in October, 1881, six miles south of Woodstock—Elder S. V. McGinnis to preach the Introductory Sermon; Elder G. R. Fuller, alternate J. J. Little, Chairman.

15. The Committee on Documents beg leave to report:

We find nothing from the documents before us claiming our attention, except Mt. Carmel Church asking a letter of dismission. We recommend that you grant Mt. Carmel Church a letter of dismission, at their request.

S. V. McGinnis, Chairman.

16. We, your Committee on Home and Foreign Missions, report:

That the Churches support the Foreign Missions as far as they are able, and, as there is great destitution in our own bounds, we recommend that the churches in our Association consecrate their ministers to the work by cutting them loose from secular labor, and letting them wait continually upon the work of the Lord.

G. R. Fuller, Chairman.

17. We, your Committee on Finance, beg leave to report:

Amount received for minutes,$12.25; Association purposes,$3.50; Total, $15.75.

Submitted, G. R. Fuller, Chairman.

18. We, your Committee on Deceased Ministers, beg to report:

The committee on the death of Rev. Peter Smith report: It is with heartfelt sorrow that we record the death of our beloved brother, Peter Smith, who died but a few months ago. At almost every annual meeting of the Association the sad intelligence is brought to us that some leader of Israel has fallen, most painfully reminding us that the fell destroyer spares not even the Shepherds of the flock. We are not in possession of the facts in relation to the time of his birth, ordinatino and death, but we have known him for some time. He has gone from a field of toil and suffering to a kingdom of rest and reward. Pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest that he will send forth laborers into his harvest. We sympathize with the friends and family of the deceased.

S. V. McGinnis, Chairman.

19. By motion, the Association withdrew from Union Church.

20. By motion, Elder G. R. Fuller was called upon to read a Circular Letter, which was read and ordered printed in the Minutes.

21. By motion, Elder N. H. Williams was appointed to write a Circular Letter to be read at our next session.

22. Mt. Carmel Church petitioned for a letter of dismission, which was granted.

23. By motion, the correspondent letter to the Cahaba Association was read and adopted.

24. The committee appointed at our last session to labor with Roups Valley Church beg leave to report: A part of the committee attended at the time appointed, and, after hearing the statements of the case, the committee decided that the church was in disorder.

G. R. Fuller, Chairman.

25. Report of the First District.—The union meeting of the First District will be held with Cedar Grove Church, commencing Friday before the second Sabbath in September, 1881—Elder S. V. McGinnis to preach the Introductory Sermon; Elder N. H. Williams alternate. Queries for discussion—For Friday afternoon: Has a lay member the right, in the absence of the deacons, to hand around the elements of the Lord's Supper? Opened by Bro. R. H. Blake. For Saturday: Has the Church a Scriptural right to labor with members who are guilty of gross public offenses? Opened by Bro. D. H. Lewis.

26, Report of the Second District—The Union meeting of the Second Disirict will be held with Hephzibah Church, beginning on Friday before the first Sabbath in September, 1881—Elder S. V. McGinnis to preach the Introductory Sermon; Elder N. H. Williams, alternate.

27. *Resolved*, That the thanks of this Association be tendered to this Church and the citizens of this community for their most welcome and cordial hospitality tendered to the Delegates and Ministers composing this Association.

28. After prayer by Bro. D. H. Lewis, a hymn was sung and the delegates gave each other the parting hand, and the Association adjourned, to meet with Mt. Carmel Church, six miles south of Woodstock, Bibb county, Ala., on Saturday before the second Sabbath in October, 1881.

JAMES N. HAYES, Stated Clerk. N. H. WILLIAMS, Moderator.

Circular Letter.

DEAR BRETHREN:—The time has arrived when you should hear something from me in the way of what is commonly called a Circular Letter, and as a substitute we offer for consideration a few thoughts on the following subject, which relates to the

FORE-KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.

Some people suppose that God, from all eternity, decreed all things whatsoever come to pass, and therefore they conclude that God, from all eternity, fixed the fate of every man. I will here state their sentiments in their own words: "God's decrees are the wise, free and holy acts of the counsel of His will, whereby, from all eternity, He hath for His own glory unchangeably foreordained whatsoever comes to pass in time, especially concerning men and angels."

Now, if this doctrine be true, I will acknowledge that election was from all eternity, but the doctrine seems to carry its own refutation in it. The authors tell us that the decrees of God are the acts of His will. They say that by these acts He has, from all eternity, foreordained whatsoever comes to pass. But every plain man knows it to be a self-evident truth that everything has a time when it takes place, and for that very good reason no act can be from all eternity. If God has, by the act of His will, foreordained all things whatsoever comes to pass, then it will follow that everything comes to pass just as He wills it, and of course no being can, or ever could or ever will, do anything contrary to His will. I cannot see any difference between this direction and deism. The deist says everything comes to pass as God wants it, and the Calvinist says God ordains whatsoever comes to pass. Now, where is the difference? I can see none. If ideas are to be drawn from words, this doctrine makes God the author of every sin in the universe, because all sins come to pass, and it says "God ordained whatsoever comes to pass," certainly if this doctrine be true, the idea of sin is a mere allusion. All angels and men are doing that which God in all eternity decreed they should do and which He by the same decree put out of their power to do. But the Lord says they have built the high places, Tophet, which is in the valley of the Son of Kinnon, to turn their sons and their daughters in the fire which I commanded thee not; neither came it into my heart.—Jer., 7th 31. There is a thing come to pass which never entered into God's heart to ordain. The decree of one sovereign are his laws; so I construe the decrees of God are God's laws; and as these are the effects of His own will, every one who transgresses them acts contrary to the wish of God.

The advocates of this doctrine commonly try to prove it by the foreknowledge of God. They say as God foreknew everything, He consequently foreordained everything; for they say they can see no difference between God's foreknowledge and decrees. Now, if God's foreknowledge and His decrees be one and the same thing, must not our first parents have been placed in a most desperate situation when they were placed in the Garden? God foreknew they would eat the forbidden fruit, and therefore, according to this doctrine, He had decreed they should eat it. He then made a law that if they did eat thereof they should surely die. So, if they refrained from eating, they would break God's decrees, and if they eat they would break God's law. It is easy to see that according to this doctrine, it was impossible for our first parents to please their Maker. The same may be said of all the sinful actions of men. God foreknew and therefore decreed them, and then, after decreeing them, made a law to punish those who commit them with eternal destruction. Surely every benevolent mind must abhor the doctrine which represents God as punishing creatures in hell fire to all eternity for doing those things he himself had decreed they should do. God

has decreed many things which never come to pass, and if his foreknowledge and decrees be the same this would prove that he foreknew many things which he never foreknew, or it would prove that he was frequently mistaken in his foreknowledge. That God has decreed some things that never did come to pass, and that some things have happened contrary to his decrees, are evident from the following passages of Scripture: The Lord said to Hezekiah, set thine house in order, for thou shalt die and not live.—II. Kings, 20,1. Although this was a firm decree, yet, on Hezekiah's repenting, God revoked it, and added to his days fifteen years. God spoke by the mouth of Jonah, saying: "Yet forty days and Ninevah shall be overthrown."—Jonah 3d, 4. This was a firm decree, yet, on repentance, the city was spared and the decree was never executed. Can we not easily see how God could foreknow all things without decreeing them? or is it not possible for him to foreknow that an event will fall out in a certain way, on certain conditions, and yet at the same time foreknow that we, by the free determinations of our own wills in acceding to or rejecting those conditions, may cause the event to fall out in another way. The following narrative respecting David when he was at Keilah is fully to the point: He was afraid that Saul and his army would come down to Keilah, and that the men of the city would give him unto them, and he enquired of the Lord and said: "Will Saul come down as thy servant hath heard? O, Lord God of Israel, I beseech thee to tell thy servant. And the Lord said, he will come down. Then, said David, will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men to Saul? And the Lord said, they will deliver thee up. Then David and his men, who were about six hundred, arose and departed out of Keilah, and went whithersoever they could go. And it was told Saul that David was escaped from Keilah, and he forbore to go forth."—I Sam., xxiii., 11, 12, 13. In this case, God knew that if David and his men should continue in Keilah, Saul and his army would go down to that place and that the men of Keilah would deliver David and his men into their hands, and yet he knew that if David would make his escape from that place neither of those things would happen. God's foreknowledge and his decrees are two very different things.—Foreknowledge is the perfection of his nature: decrees, the act of his will. To say that God's foreknowledge and his decrees are the same things, is the same as to say that wisdom and action are the same thing. If his decrees originated from his foreknowledge, then there is all the difference between the former and the latter that there is between a cause and its effect. But I think his decrees are caused neither by his wisdom nor his power, but by his disposition. He does not decree because he knows how to do it, nor because he has the power to do it, but he makes his decrees because he is disposed to do so. As God's decrees are distinct from, and were not occasioned by, his foreknowledge, of course the whole system of unalterable decrees, that has been built on the foreknowledge of God, must fall to the ground. It appears to me that we might as well try to prove that God is the author of sin from his power as from his wisdom. To say that because God is omnipotent, he is therefore the perfection of every wicked action in the universe, is just as reasonable as to say that because he is allwise therefore he has ordained all the wickednesss that ever happens. Any of us would think it hard to be condemed for murder or forgery, merely because it was proven that we had the ability to commit crimes. The Legislature of this state foreknew that felonies would be committed, but that is no proof that they desired them. If we allow God to be as free as our earthly law-givers we can easily concieve how he can foreknow the crimes of his subjects without decreeing them. Some people argue that although finite beings may foreknow things without ordaining them, it is not so with God; that as he is infinite in wisdom, holiness and power, he therefore could not foreknow that anything would come to pass, nor would not suffer anything to happen unless he had decreed it. With some this argument is insurmountable, but with me it has no weight at all. The conclusion is at war with the premises. The premises are that God is a being of infinite wisdom, holiness and power; and the conclusion is, that therefore he must have decreed all the folly and wickedness in the universe. But one will say, if God did not want sin committed, why did he not prevent it? To this I answer that, as God is infinitely good and wise, he certainly knows his own business. It does not become ignorant and corrupt mortals to charge the wise and holy God with all the crimes in the world, merely because he does not do everything we think he ought to do. God, in my opinion, has used all the means to prevent wickedness that are consistent with our happiness as intelligent creatures. Liberty and happiness are inseparable, and if we were not left free to choose between right and wrong, our

actions would not be the result of choice, but of necessity. Holiness and happiness are inseparable. Holiness consists in conformity to God, who does good to all his creatures; therefore he that never does good is not holy nor happy. If God, by an irresistible decree, forces us to all our actions, then, in reality, we never do good nor evil, because all we do must be ascribed to that being who compells us. If we are not free we cannot do good; if we do not good we cannot be holy; and if we are not holy we cannot be happy.—So, it is evident that if God had made it impossible for us to do evil, he by so doing would have made it impossible for us to do good, and therefore impossible for us to be good or holy or happy. The will that acts not freely acts not at all, because every action to which I am forced must be ascribed not to me but to the one that forced me. If we have no free will, we have none at all, because freedom is essential to the existence of a will, and a will is essential to the existence of a rational being. If we were not free, and therefore capable of sinning, we would not be men or women. For a person to ask the question: Why did not God make me incapable of committing sin? is about as good sense as to say: Why did not God make me a rock or a dumb beast? It is impious for the being that is formed to say to the one who formed him, Why have you made me thus? But it is not impious for me to justify the ways of God to men. If I believed that everything which comes to pass was unalterably decreed to happen, I would not try to control the passsng events, because I would know that everything I might do could have no effect. But we find that the Fatalists are as prudent and industrious in trying to manage passing events as other men. Hence I conclude that they act contrary to their system. I never knew one of them to try to control the wind, nor the clouds, although they, as other men, feel deeply interested in the weather. If any rational man believed that all the actions of men are unalterably decreed by God, he would be as far from trying to overrule them as he would be from trying to manage the winds and the clouds. It would not consist with the happiness of the people in this country to prohibit them from owning houses or horses, yet if our rulers had never suffered a house to be built or a horse to live in the state, the crimes of house-burning or horse-stealing would never have been committed among us. So it would be inconsistent with our happiness for God to have withheld from us free agency. And yet every one must admit that if we were not free agents we never could have sinned. To blame God with the sins of mankind is infinitely more absurd than to blame an earthly law-giver with the crimes of his subjects.

G. R. FULLER.

Letter of Correspondence.

To all Sister Baptist Associations with whom we may Correspond:

Dear Brethren—Through the blessings of our Heavenly Father, we have just closed our fourth annual session of the Harmony Baptist Association. For the advancement of our Redeemer's Kingdom, and for the promotion of His cause here on earth, we petition with this letter, by hand of our appointed Delegates, correspondence with you. Our fourth session was one of harmony, love and peace; and we ask an interest in your prayers. May the Great Head of the Church preside over your and our Associations, and lead us all in the ways of truth, and restore peace in all the borders of our Zion is our prayer. Our next session will be held with Mt. Carmel Church, on Saturday before the second Sabbath in October, 1881, six miles south of Woodstock, Bibb County, Alabama.

JAMES N. HAYES.
Clerk.

N. H. WILLIAMS,
Moderator.

STATISTICS OF THE CHURCHES.

CHURCHES	DELEGATES. (Ordained Ministers in small capitals. Absentees marked thus*)	Baptized.	Rec'd by Letter	Restored	Dismissed.	Excluded.	Died.	Total.	Date of Constitution.	Monthly Meet'g	Pastors.	PostOffice	Church Clerk.
1st District.													
Mt. Olive.....	Elder G. R. Fuller, J. W. Mathews, James N. Hayes.		1		3			55	1858	4	N. H. Williams	Vance's	J. E. Colbert.
Cedar Grove	Elder S. V. McGinnis, D. H. Lewis, John N. Hayes.				4	2		68	1836	3	I. H. Hagler	Scottsville	John N. Hayes.
Siloam	Elder N. H. Williams, R. H. Blake. J. J. Little.	3	4			1	1	58	1844	2	N. H. Williams	Scottsville	J. J. Little.
Enon.....	Richmond Riley, D. A. Johnson, J. A. McElroy.	12	6		1		2	69	1819	2	O. J. Cottingham	Six Mile	F. M. Arnold.
2d District.													
Roup Valley	Not Represented.												
Hephzibah,....	John Riley, M. J. Parsons, Thomas Willard.*				1	3		54	1847		T. A. Norwood	Woodstock	N. B. Durrett.
Mt. Carmel...	R. R. McCully, M. L. McElroy, Levi Nelson.*	11	3	1		1		71		3	W. G. Hubbard.	Scottsville	J. E. Defer.

RECAPITULATION.

Baptized, 26; Received by Letter, 14; Restored, 1; Dismissed, 9: Excluded, 7: Died, 3: Total from the table, 385.